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CHAPTER 27

MAXIMUS AND MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

MICHAEL BAKKER

Psychology as a science started to develop in the West when Maximus was still relatively unknown. There are some analogies that are worth exploring, even though there is no evidence of any significant influence of his thinking on modern psychology. In this chapter the following two parallels will be treated: (1) that between Maximus' ascetic teachings and cognitive therapy and (2) that between his view of the soul and depth psychology.

By way of introduction, let us turn to Maximus' letter to George the prefect of the province of Africa, the first of his epistles according to the numbering of the PG. After comparing his friend to nothing less than the sun, Maximus remarks that virtue is a matter of intention (γνώμη) rather than rank, and imitation of God a matter of disposition (διάθεσις) rather than dignity (*Ep.* 1, PG 91. 364A). He also contrasts the blessed ones like prefect George, in whom the firm love for God has taken root in the depth of their souls, with those who prefer material things, whose disposition (διάθεσις) is not fixed but is subject to change (PG 91. 364B–365A). He then writes the following: 'Nothing of what exists, my blessed master, can divert you from the good and deifying habit (ἕξις) that accompanies your intention (γνώμη) on your way towards God' (PG 91. 365B). We encounter here three keywords in Maximus' vocabulary—διάθεσις, ἕξις, and γνώμη—which often occur together in his oeuvre. The first of them, διάθεσις, can be translated in a straightforward manner as 'disposition'. The second, ἕξις, is a noun derived from the Greek word 'to have' (like its Latin counterpart *habitus*), indicating an acquired state or pattern of behaviour. The third term, γνώμη, has even more shades of meaning (opinion, choice, disposition of willing) in addition to the translation 'intention'; in fact, this is the word that Maximus used to differentiate the deliberative 'gnomic will' from the stable 'natural will' (as part of his intellectual battle with the monothelite heresy). In cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), one encounters a similar stress on habits or behavioural patterns with which are connected opinions and automatic thoughts.

In his letter Maximus also mentions the 'depth of the soul' (PG 91. 385C) and the 'hidden part of the heart' (PG 91. 380B). These are notions one finds in other parts of his writings as well and they suggest a parallel with depth psychology. The name of this type of psychology suggests a realm below, and is often associated with the notion of the unconscious, and the sexual and aggressive drives of a human being. The name that comes to mind in this context is of course that of psychiatrist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), who is often associated with the term 'subconscious', although he himself preferred 'unconscious'. In his topology of the soul he positions the drives in the *id*, below the *ego*. The spatial metaphor is taken up by Kallistos Ware, who criticizes Freudian psychoanalysis for guiding us 'not to the "ladder that leads to the kingdom", but to the staircase that goes down to a dank and snake-infested cellar' (Ware 1996: 56). The term 'unconscious', however, leaves room for a realm above; in fact, this was proposed by the Romanian theologian Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–93), who discerned within the unconscious a 'supraconscious'. This is the 'room upstairs, where superior powers are stored and function, ready to flood the conscious life and even the subconscious, with their cleansing power, when we offer them the [right] conditions' (Stăniloae 2002: 98). Although he does not refer to it, Stăniloae, as a student of Maximus, must have read the Confessor's response to the question of his friend Thalassius about the upper room where the Last Supper was held. Typically, Maximus gives this room a deeper sense: it is 'the large and spacious understanding (διάνοια) and the familiarity with knowledge (γνῶσις) embellished with divine visions of mystical and ineffable doctrines' (*Q.Thal.* 3, Laga–Steel 1980: 59). So there appears to be a hidden part of the heart below and above.

Using the spatial metaphor we could say that, along the horizontal axis, we will compare Maximus' practical advice on handling thoughts and developing good habits with a modern cognitive(-behavioural) therapist's down-to-earth treatment of behavioural problems. Since it will not be possible to give an in-depth description of CBT, I will use as main reference for this type of psychotherapy, *Ancient Christian Wisdom and Aaron Beck's Cognitive Therapy: A Meeting of Minds* (Trader 2011; reviewed in Bakker 2012). Because over the last thirty years there has appeared 'an abundance of treatment outcome studies demonstrating CBT's efficacy for most forms of psychopathology including anxiety disorders, depression, eating disorders, schizophrenia, personality disorders and more' (Boswell et al. 2011: 107), this form of short-term psychotherapy is widely applied nowadays and preferred by insurance companies. Classical psychoanalysis, as developed by Freud, on the other hand, involves many sessions over a longer period and is less and less applied. This is not necessarily the case for other schools of depth psychology that we will look at, when we explore the vertical axis. In general, the psychodynamic approach (another name for depth psychology) has less empirical support than CBT, because, '[h]istorically, psychodynamic research focussed primarily upon the intensive study of individual patients (i.e., the case study) instead of large-scale trials' (Boswell et al. 2011: 103).

Before tracing the background of Maximus' psychology, which precedes the sections dealing with the two parallels, we have to look at the methodological difficulty

of comparing thinkers who lived in different ages and under totally different circumstances. While for modern humanity the devil is perhaps merely a figure of speech, Maximus interprets King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in Jeremiah 34 (LXX = TM Jer. 27) as the devil (*Q.Thal.* 26, Laga–Steel 1980: 173). Moreover, he speaks about him as a real person, who has an intention (γνώμη) in line with sinners who willingly abandon God to pursue pleasure (Laga–Steel 1980: 175); God allows him and his demons to tempt us, as he did with Job. 'The demons either tempt us themselves or arm against us those who have no fear of the Lord. They tempt us themselves when we withdraw from human society, as they tempted the Lord in the desert' (*Car.* 2. 13, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 94; Palmer et al. 1981: 67). Maximus interprets the helpers given by God to the king of Babylon as demons who attack humans according to their specialization in evil (*Q.Thal.* 26, Laga–Steel 1980: 181). Elsewhere, he lists the three main thoughts (λογισμοί) of 'gluttony, avarice, and self-esteem' (*Car.* 3. 56, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 170; Palmer et al. 1981: 92). From these are born, respectively, unchastity, greed, and pride. 'All the rest—the thoughts of anger, resentment, rancor, listlessness, envy, backbiting, and so on—are consequent upon one of these three. These passions (πάθη), then, tie the intellect (νοῦς) to material things and drag it down to earth.' The terms 'thoughts' (λογισμοί) and 'intellect' (νοῦς), and the linking of demons to specific passions, remind one of Evagrius of Pontus, to whom Maximus owes many of his psychological insights. In *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity*, Brakke says the following:

> [T]o read Evagrius's demonology as an ancient and highly perceptive anticipation of modern psychology, as tempting as that might be, would be to attribute to Evagrius notions of repression, sublimation, and unconscious motives that he did not have. Still, we may understand that his strategies of naming thoughts, identifying the demons, and observing and analysing their methods gave monks a vocabulary and set of strategies that enabled them, in our terms, to talk about their feelings and to analyse them from a distance.
>
> (Brakke 2006: 77)

Repression as the blocking of painful memories, such as sexual abuse during childhood, is a modern notion that seems indeed not to be part of Maximus' psychology. In that sense his world differs much from that after Freud, who was described in 1939 by W. H. Auden thus: 'to us he is no more a person /now but a whole climate of opinion / under whom we conduct our different lives' (Auden 1976: 217). Were Maximus alive today, he would probably not dismiss a patient's struggle with demons as a mere metaphor or hallucination, as a post-Kantian psychologist might be inclined to do, but take it seriously as a real assault by the devil and pray for 'an angel sent by God' (*Q.Thal.* 52, Laga–Steel 1980: 425) to dispel the attacks. Maximus would probably find it odd that a curer of souls is anxious not to move beyond the frontiers of the phenomena into the noetic realm, a 'hidden world' (*Ep.* 1, PG 91. 389C) perceived by the *nous*, the spiritual or intuitive intellect (νοῦς), rather than the *logos* or discursive reason (λόγος). (I return to the psychic instruments νοῦς and

λόγος in the next section.) Actually, Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), father of another school of depth psychology (analytical psychology), saw the death of metaphysics precipitated by Emmanuel Kant (1724–1804) as a reason to move from futile speculation about objects outside our human experience to one's self (Bakker 2012: 82). Moreover, Nicolaus (2011) shows that even the *Weltanschauung* of two men living in the same age and on the same continent—Carl Jung and Nikolai Berdyaev—may differ sharply. Since a human being with his or her thoughts, feelings, and longings basically functions the same as 1,400 years ago, it seems worthwhile to compare Maximus' analysis to that of modern psychologists.

Epistemological, Anthropological, and Mystagogical Background

The introduction has shown that psychology is closely bound up with epistemology and anthropology. In this section we will attempt to draw with rough strokes the intellectual and spiritual habitat of Maximus and identify his sources.

As the first source for Maximus' psychology, his own experience must be mentioned.[1] The *Centuries on Love* reveal an intimate knowledge about the workings of the human soul born from intense training (ἄσκησις) in praxis and contemplation (θεωρία). In his *Mystagogy*, he refers to the things 'mystically contemplated' by his unnamed spiritual elder (γέρων, *Myst.* Prol., Boudignon 2011: 4), but it is obvious that he is intimately acquainted with his subject. In *Q.Thal.* 60 he speaks with authority about two types of knowledge of which the latter is gained by experience:

> The scriptural Word knows of two kinds of knowledge of divine things. On the one hand there is relative knowledge, rooted only in reason and concepts (νοήμασιν), and lacking in the kind of experiential perception (αἴσθησιν) of what one knows through active engagement; such relative knowledge is what we use to order our affairs in our present life. On the other hand there is that truly authentic knowledge, gained only by actual experience, apart from reason or concepts, which provides a total perception of the known object through participation by grace.
>
> (Laga–Steel 1990: 77; trans. Bradshaw 2004: 192)

Bradshaw quotes this passage to illustrate how Maximus interprets Ps-Dionysius the Areopagite, 'the all-holy and truly divine interpreter' (*Myst.* Prol., Boudignon 2011: 4), who in his *Mystical Theology* sees the ascent of Moses up Mt. Sinai as the movement into the 'darkness of unknowing' (*Theol.myst.* 1. 3, Heil–Ritter 1991: 144). So for Maximus the 'truly authentic knowledge' is beyond concepts and knowing; this mystical knowledge

[1] See Louth 1996: 25 on the Macarian Homilies as inspiration for the importance Maximus attributes to experience. See also Miquel 1966 on experience and Maximus' epistemology.

is therefore not subject to objective scientific scrutiny.[2] Concerning the 'split between scientific and religious knowledge', Hardy observes:

> As a source of knowledge, mysticism is of course in opposition to the scientific mode—the empirical, testable, provable knowledge which is the currency of the modern Western world. Freud, Jung and Assagioli [the founder of the school of psychosynthesis], all medical doctors, trained in the scientific method, had to maintain the validity of their work against such opposition as that of Karl Popper and the criticism of 'closed systems' theory, and still are hardly regarded as respectable in the university system. Jung and Assagioli had the added 'disadvantage' of drawing on a spiritual awareness which they regarded as fundamental to their work.
>
> (Hardy 1987: 110)

Dionysius is among the limited number of sources Maximus mentions by name. An important quarry for his anthropology and psychology is Nemesius of Emesa's *On the Nature of Man*. While Nemesius explicitly names and compares the views of Galen, Aristotle, Plato, the Stoics, and other ancient authors, Maximus tacitly quotes him *in extenso* (*Amb.Io.* 10:44, PG 91. 1196C–1197D; Louth 1996: 148–50). The frequent use of the term ἕξις (see my introduction to this chapter) seems to have been inspired by reading Aristotle himself or a work other than *On the Nature of Man*. Another source, besides the already-mentioned Evagrius, which Maximus does not name, are the Macarian homilies (in whatever guise Maximus knew them). 'Maximus has used the Macarian understanding of the place of the heart to balance the primacy of the intellect found in Evagrius. This gives his anthropology a far more holistic quality. He has grounded Evagrian spirituality in the earth of a Macarian heart' (Plested 2004: 242). The term 'heart' is perhaps even more intangible and immeasurable than the word 'soul' (ψυχή) to modern academic psychologists. Central for Maximus remains human experience; in order to describe it, he eclectically uses sources and feels free to adapt concepts if needed.

In the quotation about the two types of knowledge above, Maximus uses the word 'perception' (αἴσθησις) in a positive sense, under the influence of the Macarian tradition it seems (see Plested 2004: 236–7). In passages dealing with ascetic praxis, however, Maximus presents αἴσθησις and αἰσθήσεις (senses) mostly in a negative light: his advice, for example, is to shut the senses (μύσας τὰς αἰσθήσεις, *Q.Thal.* 49, Laga–Steel 1980: 357) when the passions revolt. Typically, Maximus' approach is not to declare the latter type of αἴσθησις as bad per se, but to locate the tension between the two types at the level of intellect (νοῦς): 'When the intellect turns its attention to the visible world, it perceives things through the medium of the senses in a way that accords with nature. And the intellect is not evil, nor is its natural capacity to form conceptual images of things, nor are the things themselves, nor are the senses, for all are the work of God'

[2] Cf. Uleman 2005: 5: '[T]he psychoanalytic unconscious is widely acknowledged to be a failure as a scientific theory because evidence of its major components cannot be observed, measured precisely, or manipulated easily. The theory's complexity renders it largely unfalsifiable.'

(*Car.* 2. 15, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 96; trans. Palmer et al. 1981: 67). It all depends on the proper use (χρῆσις)[3] of the soul's natural powers and whether 'sense (αἴσθησιν) is ennobled by reason' (κατὰ λόγον, *Amb.Io.* 10: 3, PG 91. 1116D; Louth 1996: 102). In that case it is possible to discern the distinctly Maximian *logoi* of Creation (see Louth 2010):

> If the soul uses [χρήσαιτο] the senses properly, discerning by means of its own faculties the manifold inner principles (λόγους) of created beings, and if it succeeds in wisely transmitting to itself the whole visible universe in which God is hidden and proclaimed in silence, then by use of its own free choice [προαίρεσις] it creates a world of spiritual beauty within the understanding [διάνοια].
>
> (*Amb.Io.* 21, PG 91. 1248C; trans. Cooper 2005: 59)

In *Ambiguum* 10 Maximus explains that intellect, reason, and sense correspond to three motions of the soul and these bring him to one of his favourite triads: that of being, well-being, and eternal being. The two ways of being at the extremes are God's alone, while the middle one (well-being) depends on 'our inclination (γνώμη) and motion' (*Amb. Io.* 10: 3, PG 91. 1112D–1116B; trans. Louth 1996: 100–2). Here we encounter again the term γνώμη already mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. This section of the *Ambiguum* alludes to the mediating role played by human beings between the sensible and the intelligible Creation (that is, the fourth division of being, on which see Thunberg 1995: 39–404). This suggests an upward motion towards the soul's cause, God, with the soul 'learning by sense (αἰσθήσει)' from below and 'grasping by intellection (νοήσει)' from above (*Opusc. de anima,* PG 91. 353D).

Perception by the senses (αἰσθήσεις) is situated at the border between body and soul, and this takes us to the body. As with perception (αἴσθησις), the sense organs (αἰσθήσεις, the term Maximus prefers to αἰσθητήρια) and the body in general are by nature good in Maximus' view; it all depends on how we use them. 'When [the soul] joins this transformed sensual operation on the one hand with the practice of virtue on the other, the whole soul/body composite becomes an agent of divine theophany' (Cooper 2005: 59; see *Amb.Io.* 21, PG 91. 1249C). Maximian anthropology follows Evagrius in substituting spirit (πνεῦμα) with intellect (νοῦς) in Paul's trichotomy of body, soul, and spirit (see Thunberg 1995: 107–13). The fourth chapter of the *Mystagogy*, entitled 'How and in what manner the holy church of God symbolically represents humankind and how it is represented by him as human', explains how we should picture the intellect as the supreme organ of the soul and thus of a human being (*Myst.*4, Boudignon 2011: 4).

What then is the place of reason (λόγος)? For Maximus, reason is the soul's organ for discursive reasoning. It is subservient to the intuitive and spiritual intellect (νοῦς): 'A pure intellect sees things correctly. A trained reason[4] puts them in order' (*Car.* 2.97, Palmer et al. 1981: 82). Maximus gives a more elaborate answer about the functioning of the pair in the following chapter of the *Mystagogy*, where he associates intellect with the

[3] See Bradshaw 2004: 3, where he discusses the use of χρῆσις, ἕξις, and ἐνέργεια by Plato and Aristotle.

[4] Palmer et al. 1981 consistently translate *logos* as 'intelligence'. I have modifed the translation by changing all instances of 'intelligence' to 'reason'.

contemplative power (θεωρητικόν) and reason with the active power (πρακτικόν) of the soul. The essences of intellect and reason need to manifest themselves progressively in, respectively, truth and goodness. The 'habit of contemplation' (θεωρητικὴ ἕξις) and the 'habit of action' (πρακτικὴ ἕξις) provide stability to the soul in its progression towards deification (*Myst.* 4, Boudignon 2011: 20–1).

Besides its association with νοῦς and αἴσθησις, *logos* in its sense of reason is associated with another group of three, that of reason, anger (θυμός), and desire (ἐπιθυμία) (e.g. *Q.Thal.* 5, Laga–Steel 1980: 65). More often Maximus refers to these psychic powers as 'desiring' (ἐπιθυμητικόν), 'incensive' (θυμικόν), and 'rational' (λογιστικόν). This tripartite division of the soul was formulated by Plato (*Republic* iv: 434D–441C) and on the whole accepted by the Greek Fathers (see Palmer et al. 1981: 380). The use of these natural—and therefore in Maximus' view fundamentally good—powers depends on a person's disposition: 'A soul's motivation is rightly ordered when its desiring power is subordinated to self-control, when its incensive power rejects hatred and cleaves to love, and when the power of reason, through prayer and spiritual contemplation, advances towards God' (*Car.* 4. 15, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 200; trans. Palmer et al. 1981: 102).

Plato's tripartite soul is part of a comparison between city and soul: 'But now the city was thought to be just because three natural kinds existing in it performed each its own function, and again it was sober, brave, and wise because of certain affections (πάθη) and habits (ἕξεις)[5] of these three kinds' (*Republic*, iv: 435B, trans. Shorey 1963: 377). Maximus uses the same metaphor when he compares Nineveh to the soul:[6]

> . . . the soul of each and every person to which, in its transgression, the word of God is sent preaching repentance unto life (cf. Jon 3:1–4). In turn we may interpret the *king* of that *city*, or soul, as the intellect (νοῦς) and its captains as the soul's innate faculties. The *men*, then, signify impassioned thoughts (λογισμούς), the *cattle* movements of the desiring faculty in relation to the body, the oxen covetous functions of the incensive faculty towards material objects, and the sheep the attempts of the senses to grasp sensible objects without intelligent reflection. So too the king is the intellect that arises, as from its throne, from the habitude (ἕξις) born of its former ignorance.
>
> (*Q.Thal.* 64, Laga–Steel 1990: 207; trans. Blowers–Wilken 2003: 155)

The intellect thus rules, or should rule, over its three psychic powers as a king commands his captains. Thunberg (1995: 260) discusses this arrangement in relation to the competing (and more Evagrian) set-up, where the intellect is closely associated with the rational power and thus a colleague of the ἐπιθυμητικόν and the θυμικόν.

To conclude this section, I would like to point to the mystagogical habitat from within which Maximus writes. This involves offering to God the correction of transgressions 'through true worship—I mean a humble disposition (διάθεσις)' (*Q.Thal.* 26, Laga–Steel 1980: 177). In its progression towards deification and mystical union,

[5] Shorey 1963: 377 n.(c), notes that: 'ἕξεις is here almost the Aristotelian ἕξις.'

[6] Palmer's translation of νοῦς as 'the psychic powers' (Palmer et al. 1981) has been modified to 'intellect'. Italics indicate quotations from Jonah 3; I have added in brackets the key Greek words.

the soul passes through the three spiritual stages described in, amongst others, the *Mystagogy*: 'By means of the nave, representing the body, it proposes ethical philosophy, while by means of the sanctuary, representing the soul, it spiritually interprets natural contemplation, and by means of the intellect of the divine altar it manifests mystical theology' (*Myst.* 4, Boudignon 2011: 4).

The Horizontal Axis: Cognitive Therapy

In this section we will look at the parallels between Maximus' psychology and cognitive therapy. This does not involve deep mysticism with the intellect soaring beyond matter and reasoning, but rather the disciplined application of reason to one's own thoughts, opinions, and habits. Here one sees that Maximus and cognitive therapy mirror an ancient example: 'modern cognitive therapy has many things in common with Stoic therapy' (Sorabji 2000: 2).

It is part of the basic ascetical handiwork that is performed during the stages of ethical philosophy and natural contemplation mentioned in the previous section. We already saw that the soul needs its reasoning power to assess what the senses suggest to it. This process Maximus describes to Thalassius, who asks how to interpret King Hezekiah blocking off the water from the springs outside Jerusalem (2 Chr. 32: 2–4, *Q.Thal.* 49, Laga–Steel 1980: 351). His answer is that the springs should be interpreted as the senses, which should be closed when under demonic attack (see previous section). This is, of course, a very drastic response, like literally shutting yourself in your monastic cell.[7] Fortunately, his answer also describes how the psyche normally processes stimuli from outside. As was the case with Nineveh, the city is interpreted as the soul and the king as its spiritual intellect (νοῦς). Maximus identifies the three court officials as the three psychic powers. He describes how the soul produces knowledge out of sensible and intelligible input:

> The waters from outside the city—that is, outside the soul—which formed the river flowing through the city are the concepts (νοήματα) that, in the course of natural contemplation, are conveyed from the sensible object through every one of the senses and stream into the soul. By these waters, or notions, reason (λόγος) passes like a river through the city of the soul and achieves the knowledge of sensible things.
>
> (*Q.Thal.*, Laga–Steel 1990: 355–6; trans. Blowers 1991: 175)

This image implies that the king should keep watch over what enters his city, if he does not completely restrict the 'stream of consciousness' (to use a phrase from literary criticism). This watchfulness (νῆψις) is described repeatedly by neptic Fathers such as Maximus.[8] It requires a rational and dispassionate attitude to detect and repel impassioned thoughts suggested by the devil. Elsewhere, however, Maximus seems to suggest that the danger is not only outside and that the king needs the impartial advice of the power of reason (λογιστικόν) to prevent him from becoming enamoured with his own thoughts. Moreover, sometimes he needs to call in an advisor from outside the city:

> Just as parents have a special affection for the children who are the fruit of their bodies, so the intellect naturally clings to its own thoughts. And just as to passionately fond parents their own children seem the most capable and most beautiful of all—though they may be the most ridiculous in every way—so to a foolish intellect its own thoughts appear the most intelligent of all, though they may be utterly degraded. The wise man does not regard his own thoughts in this way. It is precisely when he feels convinced that they are true and good he most distrusts his own judgment. He makes other wise men the judges of his own thoughts and arguments.
>
> (*Car.* 3. 58, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 200; trans. Palmer et al. 1981: 92)

Judgements about thoughts may be coloured by a high opinion about oneself, but also by the opinions of others and private opinions about other people and things. This truism is at the heart of cognitive therapy: 'The basic concept in the cognitive model affirms that the way people feel and behave stems not from a situation in itself, but from the way in which they interpret or construe that situation' (Trader 2011: 51). This suggests a parallel with Maximus' terms 'intention' or 'opinion' (γνώμη) and 'disposition' (διάθεσις), because we interpret similar situations in a similar way, and because our views and attitudes tend to be surprisingly stable.

As already said in my introduction, Maximus often uses the term 'habit' (ἕξις) when speaking of γνώμη and διάθεσις.[9] Habits seem to be short-cuts in the full process of willing which consists, according to Maximus, of more than ten steps a human being has to go through if he or she is to act fully rationally. The term διάθεσις occurs as one of the steps of the process of willing which Maximus describes to the deposed patriarch Pyrrhus during their theological disputation: 'This is called the faculty of will of the rational soul. It is according to this that we consider when willing, and in considering, we wish what we will. And when willing, we also inquire, examine, deliberate, judge, are disposed towards, choose, initiate, and use' (*DP*, PG 91. 293B–C). I would say that a habit (ἕξις) skips the steps of inquiry, examination, deliberation, and judgement, and goes straight to disposition (διάθεσις) or rather choice (of means: προαίρεσις).

Habits suggest unconscious processes taking place without a person really being aware of them, for example shifting gear while driving a car. While 'the psychoanalytic

[7] I used this while working as a chaplain with a prisoner struggling with his alcohol addiction. I suggested he shut off his television set, instead of being bombarded with images of people drinking happily, when his demons attacked him during the long evenings in his prison cell. Using Maximus' metaphor, I asked him who was sitting on the throne of his city, which made him think very deeply.

[8] Cf. the full title of the *Philokalia*, in which Maximus takes up more space than any of the other authors in this collection.

[9] Aristotle, in whose virtue ethics habit plays an important role, says in the fourth book of his *Metaphysics* that one of the senses of ἕξις is διάθεσις (Ross 1958: vol. 1, 1022b).

unconscious is, to most laypeople and those in the arts and the humanities, the only unconscious', Uleman (2005: 4) compared its 'primary metaphor of a hydraulic system with various fluid (drives, energy) seeking discharge (pleasure) and being channeled or blocked by defenses or sublimations' to the metaphor of a computer associated with the 'cognitive unconscious'. The latter concept of the unconscious was introduced in 1987 in an essay by Kihlstrom describing:

> [T]he ways in which the computer as metaphor formed the basis for increasingly complex conceptions of human mental processes ... Unlike the psychoanalytic unconscious, it has no innate drives that seek gratification without regard to constraints of reality and society. In fact it is rather cold, apparently rational, and amotivational, compared to the heat and irrationality of psychoanalytic drives and conflicts.
>
> (Uleman 2005: 5)

How then to adjust faulty ('maladaptive') thinking and habits? The answer of cognitive therapy is to become aware of your trains of thought by a cold analysis as if you were a computer programme:

> In cognitive theory, metacognition refers to 'thought about a thought' in which a person examines and evaluates his personal theories and hypotheses about himself, others, and his world, thereby regulating his core schemata, assumptions, and rules. Beck views metacognition as a cognitive system designed to consciously control and sometimes override primitive thinking that characterizes the rest of the animal kingdom.
>
> (Trader 2011: 109)

Consciousness of a hidden opinion and its accompanying thoughts and feelings comes about when a client forces him- or herself—or rather is forced by the therapist—to analyse hidden inner processes. The most important step in becoming conscious of one's 'schemata' is probably the decision to go into therapy, that is, the realization that one needs help.

The Greek word that comes closest to being an equivalent of consciousness is to my mind συναίσθησις, related to the term αἴσθησις discussed above. Galen, Aristotle, and Nemesius use it in a medical context (suffering from a πάθος), and Plotinus in the sense of self-awareness. The attacks of demons and the suffering from involuntary (ἀκούσια) misfortunes lead according to Maximus to συναίσθησις, as does becoming aware of one's previous mistakes and accepting 'voluntarily (ἑκουσίως) the yoke of the king of Babylon' (*Q.Thal.* 26, Laga–Steel 1980: 177).

To conclude this section, it is good to remind ourselves of the goal of our ascetic endeavours: love, defined by Maximus as 'a good disposition (διάθεσις) of the soul' (*Car.* 1. 1). It is the result of obeying the scriptural law (associated with natural contemplation, the second spiritual stage), which turns 'fear (of punishment) into a disposition (διάθεσις) slowly but surely strengthened by deliberate willing (γνώμη) of the good. It turns their customary behaviour into a (permanent) habitude (ἕξις) purged by the forgetting of their former ways, and simultaneously engenders the love of others' (*Q.Thal.* 64, Laga–Steel 1990: 235; trans. Blowers–Wilken 2003: 168).

The Vertical Axis: Depth Psychology and the Unconscious

Let us start this section with an example of consciousness (συναίσθησις) that is the result of an experience belonging to the third and final spiritual stage, that of mystical theology:

> When the intellect is ravished through love by divine knowledge and stands outside the realm of created beings, it becomes aware of God's infinity. It is then, according to Isaiah, that a sense of amazement makes it conscious of its own lowliness and in all sincerity it repeats the prophet's words: *How abject I am, for I am pierced to the heart; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts* (Isa. 6: 5).
>
> (*Car.* 1: 12, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963: 54; trans. Palmer et al. 1981: 54)

The psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–70) would probably identify this as a 'peak experience'. He, along with William James (1842–1910) and the already mentioned Roberto Assagioli, were pioneers of what is now called transpersonal psychology (Rowan 2005: 27–47). The ideas of Maslow, such as his 'hierarchy of needs', have been criticized for their lack of scientific rigour. Why then do his and other more 'esoteric' theories appeal to the modern human being, who also tries to be a rational creature? To my mind, this apparent schizophrenia stems from a deep desire not be irrational but rather to be 'hyperrational', to use the favourite prefix *hyper* (beyond) of Ps-Dionysius the Areopagite. Mystical theology, the 'darkness of unknowing', beyond reason (λόγος) and even intellect (νοῦς), beckons. It seems natural to associate this 'darkness of unknowing' with the 'supraconscious' mentioned in my introduction. Assagioli also calls it the 'superconscious' or 'higher unconscious': 'From this region we receive our higher intuitions and inspirations—artistic, philosophical or scientific, ethical "imperatives" and urges to humanitarian and heroic action' (Assagioli 1980: 17). Using the term 'heart' of the Macarian tradition, also used by Maximus instead of νοῦς (see *Q.Thal.* 5, Laga–Steel 1980: 65), the modern γέρων Kallistos Ware gives the following description:

> The heart includes what we today tend to describe as 'the unconscious'. The heart, that is to say, includes those aspects of myself which I do not as yet understand, the potentialities within myself of which I am at present largely unaware ... we may say that the heart is open both below and above, to the abyss of the subconscious below; above, to the abyss of mystical supraconscious, below to the forces of evil; above, to the Divine Light.
>
> (cited in Nicolaus 2011: 24)

If we combine this with Maximus' interpretation of the Last Supper's upper room, also mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, we end up with a house with a cellar and an attic as a metaphor for the soul with, respectively, its lower and higher unconscious.

While Ware has a negative view of the cellar, Stăniloae, in a typically Maximian fashion, does not regard the lower unconscious as evil by nature. The energies below, however, need to be balanced by the forces of the 'upper room of the soul'. By calling them 'psychic energies of desire and anger' he makes a tacit reference to the ἐπιθυμητικόν and θυμικόν (Stăniloae 2002: 100).

Ware referred to the subconscious and superconscious within human beings as abysses. Similarly, Maximus compares the abyss of the intellect (νοῦς) to the abyss of God in *Amb.Io.*, where he explains a passage from Gregory Nazianzen quoting Psalm 41: 8 (LXX = TM 42: 7) ('Abyss calls to abyss in the noise of your cataracts'):

> Every intellect (νοῦς), because of its invisible nature and the depth and multitude of its thoughts, is to be compared to an abyss, since it passes beyond the ordered array of the phenomena and comes to the place of intelligible reality. Or again, when in faith by the vehemence of its movement it passes beyond what is fitting, and comes to rest in itself, in every way fixed and unmoved, because it has passed beyond everything, then it necessarily calls upon the divine wisdom, which to the understanding is really and truly the unfathomable abyss.
>
> (*Amb.Io.* 71, PG 91. 1408D–1409A; trans. Louth 1996: 164)

While there is no equivalent for the psychoanalytic unconscious in Maximus, one might see a parallel in ignorance. On the one hand, it is clearly a sin: 'The darkness of ignorance and the unimaginable depth of evil have come over human nature like an abyss, and the mountains of error—meaning "the spirits of wickedness" (Eph. 6: 12)—have rooted themselves on it.' (*Q.Thal.* 64, Laga–Steel 1990: 193; Blowers–Wilken 2003: 148). On the other hand, we have the darkness of unknowing which Maximus associates with the latest stage of spiritual life, mystical theology.

Maximus in Dialogue with Modern Psychology

Imagine if Maximus the Confessor were to visit our present world and age.[10] At first, he would undoubtedly be in awe of the technological progress, the advances in medicine, etc. He would probably avidly read handbooks of neuropsychology, cognitive therapy, and the behavioural sciences, the successors of Nemesius' *On the Nature of Man*, and draw from them useful insights and techniques. His basic view of the human being's inner cosmos and his place in the macro-cosmos, however, would probably stay the same. Becoming more acquainted with the modern human being, he would probably be appalled by the little spiritual progress made, the addictions and depressions, despite all

[10] For a similar thought experiment involving Plato, see Assagioli 2002: 3–4.

the affluence available. As Paul did on the Areopagus, he would perhaps try to adapt his language to appeal to an audience not well versed in the Old and New Testaments, blind to symbolism, and ignorant of his mystagogical habitat. His pedagogical style, however, would probably also stay the same, attempting to draw the other into the mystery of the *logoi* of Creation. Rather than Maximus descending into polemics as with the deposed patriarch Pyrrhus, I imagine him more than willing to address questions and engage in a dialogue with modern psychology. Many topics remain to be explored: his teaching about the human will, the personal *logos* of a human being and how to discern it, and his lists of λογισμοί/πάθη in relation to the latest version of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-5*, American Psychiatric Association 2013), to name but a few.

Suggested Reading

A fundamental work on Maximian psychology remains Thunberg 1995. The various schools of modern psychology have produced a plethora of books. Browsing through *DSM-5* (American Psychiatric Association 2013) gives an impression of psychopathology according to a coalition of mental health professionals, insurers, and the pharmaceutical industry. Hardy 1987 is recommended as a guide to a type of psychology that has a more holistic view of human beings that is more compatible with Maximus' teachings. Cooper 2005, Nicolaus 2011, Trader 2011, Chirban 2012, and Bakker 2013 are examples of attempts to bring modern psychology into dialogue with the church Fathers.

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PG 90. 959–1082, Ceresa-Gastaldo 1963, Palmer-Sherrard-Ware 1981 (in *Philokalia*).

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